

THE INFLUENCE OF CERVANTES' DON QUIXOTE  
ON FIELDING'S PARSON ADAMS

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Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote and Henry Fielding's Parson Adams are two of the best-loved characters in fiction. They are so masterfully endowed with human qualities that they come alive for their readers, who sympathize with their foibles and learn to love them as friends. A person who has read both Don Quixote and Joseph Andrews cannot fail to notice that the two central characters have much in common, particularly a desire to impose an idealistic vision on an unresponsive world. This basic similarity, along with Fielding's acknowledged admiration of Cervantes' masterwork,<sup>1</sup> suggests that Cervantes may have influenced Fielding strongly in the creation of Parson Adams.

A close examination of the two characters reveals numerous similarities in physical appearance and personal qualities. These resemblances are by no means identities, but they are unmistakable, nonetheless, and too numerous to be coincidental. Knowing that Fielding admired Don Quixote and that he had often taken a basic plot, effect, or incident from another author and adapted it in a novel or play of his own, one might suspect that this is the case with the similarities between Don Quixote and Parson Adams.

Apparently Fielding had been favorably impressed by the

<sup>1</sup>Fielding stated on the title page of Joseph Andrews that the novel is "Written in Imitation of the Manner of Cervantes, Author of Don Quixote."

character of Don Quixote and so had decided to embody the basic idea of quixotism in an English character. Fielding may consciously have chosen the personality traits of Don Quixote that he felt had been particularly effective in the Spanish character and that could also be effectively adapted to an English one. Naturally, these qualities had to be characteristics not directly connected with the satire on chivalry; they also could not be highly individual peculiarities, but rather, general qualities that could be altered and freely adapted to another character.

The significant changes in these basic personality traits, plus the qualities that set Parson Adams apart from Don Quixote and make him a unique character, indicate that Fielding was not tied to copying but that he used the influence of Cervantes as a stimulus to his own creative process.

Don Quixote and Parson Adams share physical similarities. According to their creators, both are about fifty years old and of a lanky build. Cervantes describes his hero as a man "with little flesh on his bones and a face that was lean and gaunt,"<sup>2</sup> and Fielding suggests that Parson Adams has a tall, spare frame when he mentions that the parson's feet almost touch the ground when he is mounted on his horse. Lankiness is implied also in the statements that Adams is a fast, vigorous walker. These similarities in age and, particularly, in physical make-up have

<sup>2</sup> Miguel de Cervantes, The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de La Mancha, trans. Samuel Putnam (London, 1953), Bk. I, Ch. 1. Because of the numerous editions of Don Quixote, subsequent references to the novel will be made by book and chapter numbers in the text.

probably been overemphasized by critics like F. Homes Dudden,<sup>3</sup> for it is an extremely general likeness. Even Fielding does not emphasize this aspect, for he develops other physical characteristics in greater detail, while only suggesting Adams' build.

The dress of each is notably careless. In preparation for his quest, Don Quixote constructs a kind of cardboard half-helmet that he attaches to his morion in order to have a knightly closed helmet. The result is makeshift in appearance, but it satisfies Quixote. He then dresses in some old pieces of armor belonging to his great-grandfather, and wears the ancient garb throughout his adventures. The fact that the armor is "black and moldy" (I, 2) adds to the comical effect of his appearance.

Parson Adams' shabby dress may be attributed partly to poverty and partly to carelessness. His white great-coat reaches mid-thigh and thus only half covers his cassock, which hangs to his knees. His cassock has a great rent in it, which the parson explains he "had the misfortune to tear about ten years ago in passing over a stile."<sup>4</sup> To complete this ridiculous portrait, a bit of "whitish" linen sometimes dangles at the hem of his cassock.

Both Don Quixote and Parson Adams provide themselves with

<sup>3</sup>F. Homes Dudden, Henry Fielding: His Life, Works, and Times (Oxford, 1952), I, 338.

<sup>4</sup>Henry Fielding, The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of His Friend Mr. Abraham Adams (New York, 1948), Bk. II, Ch. xiv. Because of the numerous editions of Joseph Andrews, subsequent references to the novel will be made by book and chapter numbers in the text.

weapons for their journeys. The Knight of La Mancha defends himself with the traditional lance, sword, and shield, while Parson Adams brandishes a crabstick. In a battle in which Adams finds himself without any defense against a sword, he improvises with a pot lid for a shield. His fists, accompanied by the crabstick, are his most potent weapons.

When seen on the road, the two share another similarity in their broken-down mounts. Don Quixote's nag Rocinante is splayhoofed, blemished, and "all skin and bones" (I, 1). The horse that Parson Adams rides was borrowed from his clerk for the trip to London and is so weak-kneed that its front legs often buckle, causing the rider to be thrown forward. Adams becomes accustomed to this habit and rarely tumbles when the horse collapses because his feet nearly touch the ground when he is mounted.

Don Quixote and Parson Adams are comparable on these points, but the details of dress, weapons, and mounts are quite different for each character; certainly the resemblance is not specific enough to show a direct influence of Cervantes on the physical appearance of Parson Adams.

The most basic similarity between Don Quixote and Parson Adams is that each is devoted to ideals that are not shared by those around him. Each interprets his world in the light of a bygone age, and in doing so, fails to see contemporary people and things as they really are. Interestingly, both Don Quixote and Parson Adams derive their idealistic philosophies from books. Don Quixote had apparently read all the chivalric romances in

existence; these books, in Cervantes' opinion, were illogically written tales, filled with fantastic, improbable, and wholly unrealistic adventures.<sup>5</sup> They were highly entertaining, nevertheless, and were widely read in Cervantes' (and Don Quixote's) time. However, there was a great difference between the way that most people read these books and the way Don Quixote read them. Others enjoyed the chivalric romances for their diversionary amusement, but none believed the fantastic exploits. Don Quixote, on the other hand, took these romances as history rather than as fiction, believing that the heroes of these books had lived in the same sense that historical figures like Julius Caesar had. Since he believed in the historical reality of these knights and their adventures, it was a short step to believing that the life of a knight could, and perhaps even should be lived again, especially since the world seemed in need of a strong force for good.

From these romances Don Quixote fabricated a world based on the chivalric ideals of honor, courtesy, devotion, and loyalty to truth and justice. He knew, though, that a knight must do more than believe in these ideals; he must exemplify them in his actions, and so Don Quixote set out on a journey to spend himself in the interest of the general good by championing the oppressed and weak.

The result of Quixote's attempts to apply the tenets and practices of literary chivalry to his own world is that his

<sup>5</sup>Aubrey F. G. Bell, Cervantes (Norman, Oklahoma, 1947), pp. 202-203.

contemporaries labeled him "mad." The question of whether or not Don Quixote is really a madman has been debated for centuries; Mark Van Doren persuasively argues that Quixote is not mad but is fully aware of the role he has assumed, since he has chosen to act the part of a knight.<sup>6</sup> Others, of course, are convinced that the man must be insane to attempt such a fantastic scheme. Most of us must agree at least that Don Quixote is "a man possessed,"<sup>7</sup> in the words of Waldo Frank. He is "possessed" of the romantic ideals of chivalry that he has learned from his books to such an extent that he eventually feels a personal responsibility to bring these ideals to his contemporary world. Whether or not he was actually insane is not as important for the purposes at hand as the understanding that Don Quixote's acquaintances considered him mad. They did so because he attempted to apply the ideals of a world that existed only in books to a contemporary world that had no knowledge of or interest in ideals.

Parson Adams also built an idealistic world on books, but his models were the works of the classical poets and philosophers. He had obviously read and studied the works of Plato, Homer, Aeschylus, Virgil, Cicero, Seneca, and others. He can, as Wilbur Cross points out, "discourse eloquently of Homer and the Greek tragedians, dwelling upon their great scenes and their nice

<sup>6</sup>Mark Van Doren, Don Quixote's Profession (New York, 1958), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup>Waldo Frank, "The Career of the Hero," Cervantes Across the Centuries: A Quadricentennial Volume, ed. M. J. Benardete and Angel Flores (New York, 1947), p. 188.

discrimination in character--rapping out, as he did so, hundreds of Greek verses with 'such a voice, emphasis, and action' that he frightened his hearers."<sup>8</sup> Aeschylus is his favorite, and he keeps with him a volume of his plays that he has lovingly copied by hand and that he peruses at idle moments. So thoroughly has Adams studied these ancient books that he becomes imbued with the values and habits that he finds set forth in them. He begins, perhaps, even to imagine that he is living in an age in which all of mankind practices these primitive virtues.

He receives no contrary information from his study of current literature, for he has read nothing but Addison's Cato, because it had an ancient hero, and Steele's Conscious Lovers, because parts of it are "'almost solemn enough for a sermon'" (III, xi). In the same way, modern history is unknown to Adams, who admits that he is "'not much travelled in the history of modern times, that is to say, these last thousand years'" (II, ix). He is not ashamed of his lack of knowledge on current subjects because his life centers around the virtuous world he finds in the writings of Greek and Roman moralists and in the Scriptures, which he knows almost by heart.

Parson Adams relies on this literature as a guide to life, and so when he emerges from the shelter of his home parish to travel to London, he expects the people he meets to be honest, just, charitable, courteous, pious, and self-sacrificing. He

<sup>8</sup>Wilbur L. Cross, The History of Henry Fielding (New Haven, 1918), I, 326.



himself is, and so are the people in the books he has read.

The books that Don Quixote and Parson Adams read encourage both to champion the cause of truth and righteousness by aiding the weak and oppressed. Don Quixote adheres to the practices of chivalry and so must pledge himself to seek those who need the help of a liberator. Time after time a fair damsel in distress (whether the distress is real or feigned) receives the immediate aid of Don Quixote on the condition only that "'it does no hurt or detriment to my king, my country, and the one who holds the key to the freedom of my heart'" (I, 29). Once he is assured that succoring the distressed maiden will not conflict with these other obligations, he does not hesitate to reply, "'I shall do my duty and follow the dictates of my conscience in accordance with the calling that I profess'" (I, 29), and he sets immediately to work.

Don Quixote always enters the affairs of others with the best intentions of helping them, but often his actions result in the undoing of those he wishes to help. The most notable incident of this kind occurs when he first sallies forth in search of adventure. When he hears the cries of a person in distress, he wastes no time in locating the unfortunate so that he may begin to fulfill a knight's duties. He discovers a boy being cruelly beaten by his master. After hearing their contrary explanations, Quixote perceives the truth in the argument and orders the farmer to release Andrés and pay him the back wages he has earned. The farmer is afraid of this angry knight and

promises to pay, but says that he has no money with him and so must take the boy home with him. Andrés cries to Don Quixote that if he goes with his master he will not receive the money, but will be flayed again. Quixote replies, "He will do nothing of the sort. It is sufficient for me to command, and he out of respect will obey. Since he has sworn to me by the order of knighthood which he has received, I shall let him go free and I will guarantee that you will be paid" (I, 4).

Don Quixote then leaves the pair, feeling proud and happy that he has so successfully righted this injustice. As anyone but Quixote might suspect, Andrés never gets paid, but is beaten unmercifully instead. In this incident, as in others that follow, Don Quixote's meddlesomeness harms those he wishes to help. He begins with an admirable impulse, but his innocent and unwarranted trust in his fellow man and his neglect in considering all facets of a situation make his efforts incomplete and superficial.

Parson Adams is just as quick as Quixote to rush to the aid of the distressed. His reading of ancient philosophy and the Scriptures has taught him the virtue in helping one's fellow man, and he never neglects an opportunity. On one occasion when Adams "heard the most violent shrieks imaginable in a female voice," he offered to snatch the gun out of his companion's hand. "'What are you doing?' said he. 'Doing!' says Adams; 'I am hastening to the assistance of the poor creature whom some villains are murdering'" (II, ix). Seeing that his cowardly companion has no

intention of helping, Adams follows the screams to discover a young woman struggling with an attacker. The parson adeptly overpowers the man with his fists and crabstick, but then fears he may have killed him; he prays, "'God forgive me what I have done in defense of innocence'" (II, ix). However, like Don Quixote, Parson Adams is not thorough in his defence of innocence; when he hails travelers for help, the assailant jumps up and claims that Adams and the woman had beaten and robbed him. Circumstances support this story, so Parson Adams and the rescued damsel are hauled off to the authorities. Although the woman is better off than she would have been if Adams had not rescued her (in contrast to the flogged boy in Don Quixote), the outcome is still much less satisfactory than it would have been if Adams had been as careful in completing the rescue as he had been generous in attempting it.

On another occasion, when everyone is bedded down for the night at Lady Booby's house, the screams, "Murder! rape! robbery! ruin!" ring out. Without even hesitating "to put a rag of clothes on" (IV, xiv), Parson Adams leaps from his bed to rush to the rescue. Though well-intentioned, he once again makes mistakes. When he grasps the supposed ravisher in the dark and feels his soft skin, Adams assumes that this must be the woman who called for help, so releases the actual assailant and plants blown on the rough-bearded chin of the woman in need of help! Like Don Quixote, he intrudes impetuously without considering all facets of the situation and the most effective means of

rescue.

If the rescues do not always turn out as planned, at least both Don Quixote and Parson Adams exhibit real bravery. In both incidents described above, Parson Adams takes grave chances with his life by attempting rescues in the dark when he knows the assailants may be dangerous. He selflessly takes no thought for his life when others are in trouble.

Don Quixote also exhibits steadfast courage in his exploits. On a dark night the Don and his squire are traveling in a lonely forest when they hear the silence broken by "the sound of measured blows, together with the rattling of iron chains, accompanied by so furious a thunder of waters as to strike terror in any other heart than that of Don Quixote" (I, 20). Although the sounds and the lonely surroundings are truly horror-inspiring, the courageous knight determines to brave whatever dangers lie ahead and discover the source of the alarming sounds. He is stopped only by the trick of his thoroughly frightened squire, who thus forces Don Quixote to wait until daybreak. The fact that the sounds are made by six harmless fulling hammers, pounding with alternate strokes as the water rushes past, does not diminish the courage Don Quixote showed, for he had been willing to investigate when he had no idea what caused the ominous sounds.

We see Don Quixote's greatest show of pure courage in his encounter with the lions. He orders the lionkeeper to release the wild animals so that he can fight them. After much debate

a cage is unlocked, and everyone but Don Quixote scurries to a safe distance. The knight waits in alert readiness as the beast puts its head outside the cage. The lion is not interested in fighting at that moment, however, and returns to its cage. But Don Quixote is not satisfied and orders the keeper to prod the animal in order to irritate it and drive it out. The keeper refuses to thus place himself in such danger, saying that Quixote's "stoutheartedness has been well established" (II, 17). The lion did not attack and the fulling mill was not a monster, but Don Quixote nevertheless displayed great courage in his willingness to face the fierce and unknown.

Don Quixote and Parson Adams are similarly courageous, but it must be noted, also, that they display their courage in different types of situations. Parson Adams' bravery is nearly always exhibited in incidents involving the distress of another person; his compassion for his fellow man requires that he be brave in order to assist. Don Quixote's courage is more often evoked by personal challenges that do not involve other people, as may be seen in the previous examples.

Allied with Don Quixote's and Parson Adams' courage and apparent zest for adventure is their mutual love of combat. Both seem to derive pleasure from conflict. Don Quixote rarely waits to be challenged, but almost always attacks before his opponents have any idea who the Knight of La Mancha is or why they are being charged. In the adventure of Mambrino's helmet, for example, Don Quixote spies the unsuspecting barber who is wearing

his brass basin on his head to protect his new hat, and, "without pausing for any exchange of words he bore down upon him with lowered lance at the best speed that Rocinante could make, with intent to run him through with his pike" (I, 21). Don Quixote imagines that the barber is a knight and the basin a valuable helmet, but the attack is, nonetheless, unprovoked and without warning. In nearly every such case Don Quixote imagines harmless people or things to be something other than they really are. Even granting that he sees a barber as a knight and sheep as an army, the fact remains that his attacks are unprovoked and his victims unprepared. His eagerness for battle may be the result of his strong desire to gain fame through victory.

Parson Adams does not attack unless justifiably provoked, but he is quick to enter a fight when challenged. More than once in Joseph Andrews a verbal disagreement turns into a brawl because Adams interprets insulting remarks directed at him or his friends as an invitation to fight. In one such instance the parson warns his antagonist that "if he attempted any rudeness to his person, he would not find any protection for himself in his gown; and clenching his fist, declared he had thrashed many a stouter man" (III, vii).

Although Parson Adams usually waits to be challenged before entering a fight, he often takes his opponents by surprise even then, because they do not know that Adams is a "fighting parson." An innkeeper who "offered to lay violent hands on him" (II, v), did not really expect to fight and so was greatly surprised a

moment later when the parson "dealt him so sound a compliment over his face with his fist, that the blood immediately gushed out of his nose in a stream" (II, v).

Adams' superior strength enables him, more often than not, to defeat his opponents and keep from sustaining serious injury. At times when his strength is not enough, his experience in combat gives him an advantage. Once when his enemy had him down, the parson let himself be beaten until the rogue thought Adams dead. He then "lay still only to watch his opportunity; and now perceiving his antagonist to pant with his labours, he exerted his utmost force at once, and with such success that he overturned him, and became his superior" (II, ix). Adams' strength and experience make him a more consistent victor than Don Quixote, and enable him to escape the painful injuries that the Don sustains.

The fact that both Don Quixote and Parson Adams have read many books was discussed earlier in connection with the idealistic values that they derive from literature, but no mention was made of the two as scholars. A reader will have noticed that Don Quixote and Parson Adams show definite signs of erudition.

Parson Adams probably receives more credit from readers for his scholarship than does Don Quixote because Adams makes the extent of his learning felt through his pride in it. He ostentatiously flips off a Latin quotation at any moment and competes in games requiring knowledge of Latin and Greek. We are told that Adams tutors boys in Latin without pay, simply because he

thinks they should know the language of scholars. Even in the midst of a tragedy, the supposed drowning of his child, we are reminded of Adams' erudition when he wails, "'It was but this morning I gave him his first lesson in Quae Genus [Latin genders]" (IV, viii). We are never allowed to forget that Parson Adams is a classical scholar because his reading has become so much a part of him and because he is somewhat vain of his learning.

In comparison, we might almost overlook the fact that Don Quixote, too, is a scholar, mainly because he is not the pedant that Adams is. Quixote is more vain of his knighthood than of his learning; nevertheless, he gives evidence at every turn of his intelligence and scholarship. Although the subject of chivalric romance is his specialty, Quixote has also read widely in pastoral literature and in political philosophy, as is indicated in various conversations throughout the book. In addition to the intelligent assimilation of his reading that we see exhibited in his discourses, we may observe "his eloquence at all times, his acuteness as a critic, his marvelous memory for details out of the remotest authors"<sup>9</sup> --all qualities that "mark him as a scholar, a man of intellect and sensibility."<sup>10</sup> Surely when we notice these habits of mind, we can agree with Mark Van Doren's estimate that before Don Quixote became "possessed" of the romance of knighthood "he must have been distinguished for his

<sup>9</sup>Van Doren, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup>Van Doren, p. 7.



erudition."<sup>11</sup> Later his "madness" may very easily keep his contemporaries from acknowledging his intellectual power, but evidence of it continues to be shown to the reader.

Don Quixote and Parson Adams display their erudition in at least one remarkably similar way--in their love and talent for speaking. They share an eloquence that impresses their acquaintances and readers time after time, and they even apply it in nearly parallel circumstances. Both deliver at least one particularly impressive monologue. Although the circumstances are not so formal that the subject could not be open for discussion, the message is so scholarly and the delivery so eloquent that in each case it has the effect of a prepared speech and thus discourages interruption.

Don Quixote delivers such an oration to a group of goat-herds after a handful of acorns had set him to thinking about the Golden Age. His descriptions of the abundance, the peaceful simplicity, and the purity of love are elegantly tempting. The lushness of the subject and the grandiloquent delivery cause the goatherds to listen "in open-mouthed wonderment, saying not a word" (I, 11). As Benedetto Croce points out, his tone is that of a great scholar who can instruct and admonish others.<sup>12</sup>

Parson Adams launches into a similarly impressive monologue when his host questions him on the Iliad in order to test his

<sup>11</sup>Van Doren, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup>Benedetto Croce, "The 'Simpatia' of Don Quixote," trans. Frederick F. Fales, Cervantes Across the Centuries, p. 181.

learning and thus determine if he is really a clergyman. Adams systematically praises Homer's subject, "action," manners, sentiments, diction, and scenery with accompanying chapter references, quotations from Horace and Aristotle, and analogies with Sophocles, Euripides, and Seneca. He concludes by reciting a hundred verses in Greek. Needless to say, his host no longer doubts his identity as a scholar, and neither do we. We are impressed by his eloquent manner of speaking and his erudition, the same qualities that mark Don Quixote's monologue on the Golden Age.

Both Don Quixote and Parson Adams deliver particularly memorable orations in defense of their favorite subjects. While in the court of the Duke and Duchess, Don Quixote is severely reproved by the ducal clergyman for his choice of knight-errantry as a profession. Quixote listens attentively to the reproaches before answering nobly to the aspersions cast on his way of life. His anger is apparent, but he channels it so effectively into the force of his reply that one must second Sancho's exclamation, "'By God, that's good! Say no more, master mine, in your own behalf, for there's nothing more in the world to be said, thought, or insisted upon'" (II, 32).

Parson Adams likewise defends his cherished beliefs: those of the ascendancy of good works over faith, his concept of charity, and the human countenance as a guide to character. But his favorite subject is that of schools and schoolmasters, and he sets forth his views on the subject while he and Joseph are

traveling. Adams holds that "'public schools are the nurseries of all vice and immorality'" and so advocates private schools, "'where boys may be kept in innocence and ignorance'" (III, v). His choice of sides on this subject obviously is determined by the moral views and personal characteristics that we have already become familiar with. Joseph hesitantly counters Adams' assertions with examples of fine gentlemen who have not been corrupted by public school educations. Then like Don Quixote, Parson Adams must summon all his powers of rhetoric in defense of his favorite subject. His show of erudition and his superior experience in debating eventually make Joseph back down; but his rhetorical powers this time are hampered somewhat by his dogmatic statements, and Joseph and the reader, though beaten by Adams' eloquence, still see some virtue in public education.

This subject of schools and Adams' conception of himself as the greatest of all schoolmasters is his "blind side" (III, v), as Fielding calls it, just as the subject of knight-errantry is Don Quixote's particular enthusiasm, or "blind side." When each is defending his views on his favorite subject, he is inclined to be blind to the other side of the question, but in spite of this dogmatism, can often be eloquently persuasive.

A third parallel in their speech-making may be seen in the advice that Don Quixote and Parson Adams give to their traveling companions from time to time. The longest and most formal speech that Don Quixote addresses to Sancho Panza is one in which he advises Sancho on the government of his island. The instructions

which Quixote says are "'for the adornment of your soul'" (II, 42) are pious and wise, as indicated by the advice to "'fear God; for therein lies wisdom,'" to "'pride yourself more on being a good man and humble than on being a haughty sinner,'" and to "'never be guided by arbitrary law'" (II, 42). Van Doren observes that these precepts are from Aristotle, Plato, and other political philosophers.<sup>13</sup> Quixote's instructions pertaining to Sancho's body, such as to "'eat neither garlic nor onions that your breath may not betray your rustic origin,'" and to "'not introduce such a host of proverbs into your conversation'" (II, 42) are humorous, but are likewise useful and perceptive.

Parson Adams' advice to Joseph on two different occasions is based on the belief that any passion is criminal if it is excessive. Grief is the passion that Adams first warns Joseph against, when the two are tied back to back to a bedpost after scoundrels have abducted Joseph's beloved Fanny. He counsels Joseph to practice patience and submission, though:

'It is true, you have lost the prettiest, kindest, loveliest, sweetest young woman, one with whom you might have expected to have lived in happiness, virtue, and innocence; by whom you might have promised yourself many little darlings, who would have been the delight of your youth, and the comfort of your age. You have not only lost her, but have reason to fear the utmost violence which lust and power can inflict on her' (III, xi).

His advice, needless to say, is totally ineffective, since he appends to it the above observations that serve only to increase Joseph's grief.

<sup>13</sup>Van Doren, p. 89.

Preceding the marriage of Joseph and Fanny, Parson Adams again harangues on excessive passion--this time, against too much love, which encourages a sinful attachment to worldly beings. Unfortunately for the effectiveness of his sermon, Adams is interrupted by the news that his youngest son has drowned and exhibits excessive grief at the loss of this dear one.

So Don Quixote and Parson Adams both deliver high-sounding advice to their companions, but Quixote's is unnecessary because Sancho is capable of governing wisely without his master's instructions, and Parson Adams' is ineffective because of his own inability to follow the advice.

Don Quixote and Parson Adams share a childlike innocence that both have apparently been able to retain for their fifty years. They are as unacquainted with evil as children often are, and as free from reserve and sophistication. When this naïveté and guilelessness are combined with inexperience (for their knowledge of the world has been limited to their home environments), and with the idealistic views of the world that they have derived from books, the two become perfect targets for all kinds of deception. Both are duped time and again because of the trusting nature that each has as a result of this native simplicity, inexperience, and reading.

The most fantastic and extended sequence of tricks is played on Don Quixote when he is in the presence of a duke and duchess. The pair have read of the Don's exploits and so are well-acquainted with his delusions. They stage a number of elaborate

deceptions that apparently fool the gullible knight and that provide themselves with great entertainment. The tricks are wholly successful, because they are aimed directly at Don Quixote's most vulnerable weakness: the traditions of knight-errantry. The first deception involves the appearance of the magician Merlin, who delivers the conditions under which the enchantment of the knight's beloved Dulcinea may be broken. The protection of a knight's own maiden is one of the basic duties of knighthood, and by this time Don Quixote has become so involved in his tales about Dulcinea that he is almost compelled to insist that the conditions for her release be carried out. The next strange figures who appear before Don Quixote inform him that he must engage in single combat with a giant, in order to break the enchantment of two lovers and remove the beards from the faces of their female attendants. Of course, such a challenge is exactly what Quixote likes best, since it involves distressed women, a giant, and enchantment, so he readily accepts the absurd conditions of a ride "through the sky" on a wooden horse while blindfolded. In this and the subsequent tricks arranged by the Duke and Duchess, Don Quixote seems to be easily deceived because of his romantic preconceptions about the duties of a knight and about the goodness of mankind. He never openly questions the tricks or the honesty of these chance acquaintances, perhaps because he is too naïve and inexperienced to be suspicious. These two factors play a greater part in earlier deceptions, as in the trick in which he ends up hanging by one arm,

but in this sequence of tricks his gullibility may be attributed mainly to his reading. He has decided to be a knight, and as such, he must welcome appropriate challenges when they come along. Don Quixote may or may not be fooled by these deceptions, but he appears to be because he wants to be.

Parson Adams is often duped because he supposes that other men are as honest and artless as he is. He is slow to discover the schoolboy tricks of a group of jokers because he is so trusting. While Adams is saying grace at dinner, one of the pranksters moves the chair from behind him, and the unsuspecting parson falls to the floor. Next, his neighbor overturns a plate of soup in his lap while another pours gin into his ale. Before the parson has quite recovered from this horseplay, someone pins a firecracker to his cassock; he starts wildly from his chair and jumps around the room. Amid the following guffaws, the jokers insert coarse witticisms about his being the best dancer in the universe, because before lighting the firecracker they had been trying to get the staid parson to minuet with the dancing master, saying that his cassock would serve for petticoats. The jokers succeed at their pranks because of the total inexperience of their victim with these standard tricks; even if Adams had heard of these tricks, he would not have supposed that people actually practiced them.

The final trick succeeds for the same reason that the deceptions of the Duke and Duchess fool Don Quixote: the pranksters appeal to the dupe's weakness, in this case, the parson's

pride in his classical learning. The jokers apologize for their former rudeness, proceed to tell Parson Adams of a "favorite diversion of Socrates" (III, vii), and flatter the parson into playing the part of the great philosopher. After happily delivering a learned oration (one of his sermons), Parson Adams allows the others to present him to the "king" and "queen" who are seated at either end of a wide throne. The throne consists of two stools with a tub of water between; a blanket covers the whole and is anchored at each end by the "king" and "queen" who are seated on the stools. When Parson Adams sits between their majesties, the two stand up, the blanket gives way, and Adams splashes into the tub.

The similarities between Don Quixote's and Parson Adams' gullibility and its sources are obvious; however, there is a significant difference between the reactions of the two: Parson Adams is slow in discovering the deceptions, but he cannot avoid seeing that they are tricks when he is dumped into a tub of water, for example. On the other hand, Don Quixote is never disillusioned by the pranksters; they maintain the deception because they can enjoy the jokes at the Don's expense without ever un-deceiving him. So, even if Quixote knows that he has been tricked, he does not have to admit it in the way that Parson Adams cannot avoid doing.

These tricks nearly always make Don Quixote and Parson Adams look ridiculous; after all, one can hardly maintain his decorum when he is riding a wooden horse while blindfolded or while he is



jumping around the room with firecrackers exploding in his cassock! But one critic after another has pointed out that outward decorum is all that is damaged, and that in every instance Don Quixote and Parson Adams maintain their native dignity. They seem to be able to do so because we are convinced of their virtue and courage, and as Joseph Andrews declares, "'I defy the wisest man in the world to turn a true good action into ridicule'" (III, vi).

Instead of diminishing Quixote and Adams in our eyes, the tricks serve to show the superiority of the heroes over their antagonists. Van Doren points out the fact that by the end of the fantastic string of hoaxes that the Duke and Duchess perform, it is not Quixote who has suffered; it is the Duke and Duchess who have "dwindled in our estimation,"<sup>14</sup> and who, in fact, appear more mad than the knight.

Wilbur Cross makes a similar observation about Parson Adams' antagonists. "All attempts to make sport of him eventually fail,"<sup>15</sup> and those who try, earn only our ridicule or contempt. The squire and his pranksters seem petty and cruel in contrast to Adams' magnanimous goodness. Dudden summarizes critical opinion and our reaction in the statement, "Each, also, though placed in ridiculous situations and subjected to unseemly usage, wonderfully retains his native dignity, and never for an instant

<sup>14</sup>Van Doren, p. 64.

<sup>15</sup>Cross, p. 331.

forfeits our respect and sympathy."<sup>16</sup>

But why, we may ask, do we react so sympathetically to these two characters? Part of the reason is that we get to know Don Quixote and Parson Adams gradually, just as we do people in real life. Each incident adds a new characteristic to their personalities or deepens an old one. Both characters become people whom we know and like and partially understand. Thus, when they become involved in a ridiculous action, as Mark Spilka points out, the humor of the situation broadens and quickens to include our knowledge of and sympathy for that person. "A sudden or prolonged juxtaposition of his inner dignity with his outer 'awkwardness' produces a state of mixed emotions in us--love, sympathy, and identification, as well as condescension--and this state is released or resolved, in turn, through laughter,"<sup>17</sup> just as it is in real life. This laughter does not discredit them any more than it does our friends when we catch them in ridiculous situations; it is simply richer, because we know and love them.

We feel sympathy for these characters, also, because we see something of ourselves in them and so at least partially identify with their actions. Benedetto Croce calls this reaction simpatia. As defined in old Italian dictionaries, simpatia is a sense of "reciprocal affinity or similarity of temperament, of desire, and of affection." It implies recognition of something that is very

<sup>16</sup>Dudden, p. 338.

<sup>17</sup>Mark Spilka, "Comic Resolution in Fielding's Joseph Andrews," College English, XV(October 1953), 13.

close to what we ourselves honor and cherish. Croce distinguishes this term from the more detached "compassion," which may be directed toward human suffering without there necessarily being an accompanying sense of identification with the sufferer.<sup>18</sup>

We can see ourselves in Don Quixote, for example, when he enters a project with the best intentions of helping someone, but somehow ends up hurting them instead, or when he harbors illusions or permits deceptions. We, like Don Quixote, test our cardboard helmets and when we see the flaws and repair them, carefully avoid a further test, preferring voluntarily to believe in an illusion.

There is much of all humanity in Parson Adams, too. We identify with the naïveté and lack of total perception that get him into ridiculous situations, like the time he wades knee-deep to cross a stream when there is a footbridge nearby and then asks a traveler if he knows of an inn where he can dry himself, when the sign is in plain sight. We, too, have trusted in the goodness of others, only to be victimized by their self-interest.

And so, because we know Don Quixote and Parson Adams as friends, and because we have a feeling of personal identification, or simpatia with them, they often arouse "at once a smile and a feeling of tender understanding, so perfectly intermingled that the smile never detracts from the admiration for . . . nobility of character and rightness of judgment, which remain intact and stand out the more vividly among the flashes of comic

<sup>18</sup>Croce, p. 179.

effect."<sup>19</sup>

After examining these similarities,<sup>20</sup> one can see that Don Quixote and Parson Adams have much in common, but that they differ significantly even in their resemblances. The qualities that Parson Adams possesses that distinguish him completely from Don Quixote should also be examined, for they attest to Fielding's essential originality in the creation of this character.

A characteristic that places the two at nearly opposite poles is the dominant personality trait of each. As Dudden and every reader observes, "Don Quixote is melancholy and ascetic," and Parson Adams "is the most cheery of men."<sup>21</sup> Adams would never be dubbed "The Parson of the Mournful Countenance"! He is simply too gay. Adams' cheerfulness is closely allied with his overflowing love of humanity, and possibly, is even a result of it. As Fielding says, ". . . his heart was naturally disposed to love and affection" (II, xvi), and we have no doubt of that fact after reading Joseph Andrews. His love shines forth in his benevolent acts--and here, incidentally, we see a radical difference between Adams and Quixote. Adams' benevolence is totally disinterested; in fact, he often sacrifices his personal interests in order to help the distressed. Once after arriving at an inn, Parson Adams learns that an injured person had been brought

<sup>19</sup>Croce, p. 180.

<sup>20</sup>Additional similarities in their Christian piety, courtesy, failure to learn from experience, and lack of monetary sense may also be noted.

<sup>21</sup>Dudden, p. 337.

there earlier for treatment. Without even knowing who the person is (he later learns it is Joseph), Adams "discovered a great deal of emotion at the distress of this poor creature, whom he observed to be fallen not into the most compassionate hands" (I, xiv). He obtains proper care for Joseph, but will not leave him until the boy is fully recovered, though he himself needs to continue his trip to London to earn money for his family. Later, Adams even risks losing his barely adequate living in order to protect the rights of Joseph and Fanny. After reading many such incidents in Joseph Andrews, we readily believe that this man would give all that he has to help any person in distress.

Don Quixote also aids the weak and oppressed, but he is not moved to act from disinterested benevolence. He is motivated instead by a desire for fame. He hopes, through his exploits, to attract the notice of an author who will perpetuate his deeds in print, and when he learns that he has become the subject of a book, he glories in the attention as tangible proof of his fame. When Quixote hears Andrés cries for help, he responds immediately, but not simply because it is a human being in distress. Rather, Quixote sees it as "'an opportunity to fulfill the obligations that I owe to my profession'" (I, 4). As Joseph Wood Krutch observes, he is "athirst for glory,"<sup>22</sup> and although fame is an acceptable motive for a knight, it is nonetheless, a self-interested motive.

<sup>22</sup>Joseph Wood Krutch, Five Masters: A Study in the Mutations of the Novel (New York, 1930), p. 77.

Parson Adams' optimistic outlook keeps discouraged moments brief. His faith in God and his belief in the goodness of his fellow man give him the cheerfulness to assure others and himself that all will turn out for the best. This optimism is contagious and along with his benevolence, attracts to Adams the poor and good-hearted. After a long absence, Adams' parishioners "flocked about him like dutiful children round an indulgent parent, and vied with each other in demonstrations of duty and love" (IV, 1). Don Quixote is without doubt loved by those who know him best, but he never inspires such shows of affection because his character has been drawn without the genial warmth, benevolence, and cheerfulness that are Adams' hallmarks.

Other evidences of the good-hearted cheeriness that separates Parson Adams so decisively from Quixote's almost uniform melancholy are his gay demonstrations of happiness. He usually snaps his fingers above his head and takes "two or three turns about the room in an ecstasy" (I, xvii) when he learns of his own or another's good fortune. One has only to recall his tearful reaction to a sentimental story and his wild display of grief at the supposed loss of his son to verify that he is equally demonstrative in all emotions, though he finds many more opportunities to go through his finger-snapping antics.

Adams' good nature is displayed also in the pleasure he derives from a substantial meal and a good smoke. He has a great appetite, but it can be satisfied with the plainest fare of bread, cheese, and ale, and afterwards he can thankfully declare

these "homely commons" have given him the satisfaction of a splendid dinner. He derives pleasure from the comfort of a pipe, which he often smokes "with great content, utterly forgetting every thing that had happened" (II, xii). As insignificant as these habits may seem, they are very much a part of Parson Adams and reflect life-loving qualities absent in the Knight of La Mancha.

Parson Adams has a number of eccentric habits that amuse his readers and add to his individuality. His forgetfulness is phenomenal. He leaves his coat one place and his horse another; he forgets to pay a bill and leaves his sermons at home. His absent-mindedness is probably a result of both a full, active mind that races on to more important considerations, and his pre-occupation with his ancient world.

Adams' faulty powers of perception add to the humorous portrait. It has been mentioned previously that he wades when he could use a footbridge, and inquires when an inn is in plain sight. Later, he fails to notice that Fanny's eager questions reveal a passion for Joseph that she verbally denies. Especially funny is the episode in which Mrs. Slipslop purposely ignores Fanny at an inn because she considers the girl beneath her station. Adams, completely ignorant of such social distinctions and failing to observe that Mrs. Slipslop has obviously recognized Fanny and is haughtily snubbing her, follows the woman into the next room, crying out, "'Madame Slipslop, here is one of your old acquaintance; do but see what a fine woman she is grown since

she left Lady Booby's service'" (II, xiii).

Another distinctive eccentricity of Adams is his pride in his learning. Don Quixote may also be a scholar, but Parson Adams is a pedant! The ingenuous flaunting of knowledge in his discourses has been discussed, but the cumulative effect of many minor incidents shows still more clearly the superiority he feels in the area of scholarship. While listening to the "History of Leonora," a story in which he becomes deeply engrossed, Adams nevertheless cannot help correcting the storyteller. He continually interrupts, first with, "'You are here guilty of a little mistake, which, if you please, I will correct: I have attended at one of these quarter-sessions, where I observed the counsel taught the justices, instead of learning any thing of them'" (II, iv), and then with the pronunciation of a Latin name which he even wonders that the lady was acquainted with! Later, he interrupts still more freely when his eight-year-old reads a story aloud in the presence of guests.

Parson Adams is completely unaware of his habit of contradicting theory with practice. The monumental example is the aforementioned advice to Joseph on the evils of excessive grief and attachment to earthly beings that ends in Adams' wild show of emotion at the loss of his son. Other examples abound. While earnestly declaring his intention to keep a secret, he tells it. He philosophically denounces the folly of growing warm in disputes in which neither party is interested and even cites a lengthy example--and the next moment he is in the midst of just



such a dispute. After listening to a companion discourse on the evils of vanity, with which Adams declared his wholehearted agreement, he fumbles in his pocket for a sermon on the subject, a sermon, incidentally, that he considers his "masterpiece," and that he would have read because he was "'confident you would admire it'" (III, iii). To add to the humor, he never realizes that he is being inconsistent.

Parson Adams may sport a collection of amusing idiosyncrasies, but, in contrast to Don Quixote, no one questions his sanity. Even with his absent-mindedness, his lack of perception, his pedantry, and his glaring inconsistencies, Adams is "sturdily sane,"<sup>23</sup> as Dudden observes; he presents a less extreme appearance to the eyes of the world than does Don Quixote, whose aberration (whether actual or feigned) causes everyone he meets to label him "mad."

Even if Adams had none of these individualizing characteristics, he would still be completely differentiated from Don Quixote because he and his adventures are thoroughly English. To begin with, the entire story takes place in an English setting. Wilbur Cross indicates that the stopping points along the road--the inns and alehouses--are exactly the kind that a traveler would have encountered on his way to London.<sup>24</sup> The arrangement of the rooms, the food, and the clientele, which The Gentleman's Magazine complained was made up of ". . . highwaymen,

<sup>23</sup>Dudden, p. 338.

<sup>24</sup>Cross, p. 342.

footpads, pickpockets, gypsies, and strolling beggars; and all sorts of rogues and villains,"<sup>25</sup> are wholly authentic.

The methods of travel described are just as typically English. As Cross notes, "In 1740, parsons and country squires often made the journey to London on horseback. If their families accompanied them, they travelled by coach--either in their own chariots, as they called them, or in the public conveyances. The poor, of course, went on foot."<sup>26</sup> The method of "ride and tie," so humorously used by Joseph and Adams, was also a common mode of travel.

The incidents in Joseph Andrews are ones that Fielding's contemporaries knew well from their own experience. There is the hunt, in which we see the exhausted hare falter, try to hide, and finally be caught and torn to bits by the pursuing hounds. This is an English sport, described with details that only an Englishmen familiar with the hunt would have noticed. This event is followed by "A scene of roasting very nicely adapted to the present taste and times" (III, vii). This is the episode in which Parson Adams is carried through a sequence of tricks by the squire and his group of pranksters. According to Cross, "roasting" was an attempt "to play off a good but eccentric character" and was "in vogue with country squires."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup>The Gentleman's Magazine VI (September 1736), 537-538, quoted by Cross, p. 342.

<sup>26</sup>Cross, p. 342.

<sup>27</sup>Cross, p. 331.

But Parson Adams is not simply a Don Quixote transplanted into English surroundings. Fielding had already tried that in his earlier play, Don Quixote in England, in which he took the Spanish knight, just as Cervantes had portrayed him, and placed him in England. This man is an English country parson, and the clergy was a profession that Fielding knew from close association. According to Cross, Fielding had made earlier studies of the clerical character in essays and sketches that appeared in his periodical, The Champion. He drew upon "observation, sermons, books in divinity, and the laws of the realm,"<sup>28</sup> and so by the time he created Parson Adams, he had a fund of details at hand. In fact, the details of Parson Adams' character and profession struck such a true note for Fielding's English readers that many thought they recognized a real life model for Adams. Many, including Samuel Richardson, identified Reverend William Young as the person who had "sat" for Adams' portrait. Young was an absent-minded, careless parson who also happened to be a Greek scholar, a schoolmaster, and an acquaintance of Fielding's.<sup>29</sup> Undoubtedly, Young had been an object of Fielding's observation in his study of the clerical character and so contributed elements to Adams' character.

Thus, Parson Adams is English in every way: the details of his uniquely English profession are drawn from English

<sup>28</sup>Cross, p. 324.

<sup>29</sup>Elizabeth Jenkins, Henry Fielding (Denver, 1948), p. 35; Cross, pp. 343-347; Dudden, p. 343; et al.

sources, and his finished character contains personal characteristics contributed by at least one real Englishman. Parson Adams is so recognizably a representative of Fielding's nationality that he is nowhere accused of being a transplanted Spaniard.

After having studied both Don Quixote and Joseph Andrews, one feels that Fielding was "steeped in Cervantes,"<sup>30</sup> as Digeon so aptly notes. Fielding admired this Spanish master and he imitated his manner, as he admitted on the title page of Joseph Andrews. A close examination of the two central characters seems to indicate that the nature of this influence on the creation of Parson Adams was that of a general inspiration. Fielding had seen that Cervantes had fulfilled an ironic purpose in Don Quixote by showing that virtue and honesty can appear "mad" in a world that is not guided by these values. In a society filled with people who are insensitive to, or actually unacquainted with, the concepts of goodness and justice, an idealistic person is ridiculously out of place and must suffer for his eccentricities.

Fielding took this basic idea of quixotism and adapted it. He incarnated the spirit of quixotism in an English character and showed this bumbling country parson trying to set the world right in terms of his own utopian vision. Through this character Fielding created an ironic effect similar to that achieved by Cervantes in Don Quixote, for like the Don, Parson Adams is

<sup>30</sup>Aurelien Digeon, The Novels of Fielding (London, 1925), p. 73.

an eccentric, aging man who shows that the person who follows an ideal is an oddity and is constantly knocked down for his refusal to compromise his virtue. His ideals get him into ridiculous situations, and the reader laughs, but it is clear that each of these characters is essentially right, and the unresponsive world is wrong. Don Quixote and Parson Adams suffer rebuffs and ridicule, but the reader develops sympathy for these embodiments of the impractical good.

Fielding's adaptation of the essential spirit of quixotism and its accompanying ironic effect form the greatest similarity between the two characters. The other resemblances could be coincidental in part, but the majority of these analogous qualities in Parson Adams were almost certainly inspired by characteristics in Don Quixote. They obviously were not copied, for we have seen the significant differences in every point of similarity that make that quality particularly suitable for Parson Adams. In fact, nowhere in Joseph Andrews can we see that Fielding was tied to copying Cervantes: no personality trait, no incident, no conversation is simply a plagiarized reworking of something in Don Quixote.

The belief that the general inspiration for Parson Adams and a number of his personal qualities came from Cervantes' Don Quixote does not, of course, deny that Parson Adams is an "original" character or that Fielding is an "original" artist. Many of the most undeniably original authors--Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton included--formed a masterpiece from a borrowed plot,

character, or theme. The borrowed item served as a stimulus rather than a crutch for these authors, just as Don Quixote did for Fielding in the creation of Parson Adams. The transformation of qualities found in Don Quixote and the addition of unique personality traits make Adams a character that Fielding himself knew, "is not to be found in any [other] book now extant."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup>Fielding, Preface to The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of His Friend Mr. Abraham Adams (New York, 1948), p. xxiv.

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THE INFLUENCE OF CERVANTES' DON QUIXOTE  
ON FIELDING'S PARSON ADAMS

by

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Numerous critics have noticed similarities between Miguel de Cervantes' main character in Don Quixote and Henry Fielding's Parson Adams in Joseph Andrews. However, critical discussions of characterization in the latter novel do not go far beyond a mention of salient points of resemblance between the two characters and the observation that Fielding was admittedly influenced by Cervantes in the writing of Joseph Andrews. A direct comparison of the similarities and an examination of the nature of Cervantes' influence on the development of Parson Adams is important for a fuller understanding of Fielding's creative process.

The most significant similarity between Don Quixote and Parson Adams is that each derives a particular idealistic philosophy from books and attempts to impose the principles of this philosophy on a world that has no interest in or knowledge of ideals. As a result, both characters are considered oddities by many of their contemporaries and so are subjected to ridicule and rebuffs. Cervantes had fulfilled an ironic purpose in showing that a person inspired by virtuous ideals can appear "mad" in a world not guided by these values. Fielding apparently wished to create a similar ironic effect by adapting the basic idea of quixotism to his own time, and so he incarnated it in an English country parson who tries to set the world right in terms of his own utopian vision.

Other notable points of resemblance between Don Quixote and Parson Adams are their willingness to aid the distressed, their courage, pugnacity, erudition, talent for speaking, naïveté, and

ability to maintain dignity in ridiculous situations. These qualities are capable of significant comparison, but they are by no means identities. There are differences within the similarities--in degree, application, situation, and so forth. Considering both Fielding's admiration for Don Quixote, and the numerous and unmistakable similarities between Don Quixote and Parson Adams, it seems probable that Fielding chose the personal qualities of Don Quixote that he had found particularly effective in the Spanish novel for adaptation in his own English character. The differences within the similarities are results of Fielding's own artistry in endowing Adams with these qualities, as are the characteristics of cheerfulness, disinterested benevolence, absent-mindedness, lack of perception, pedantry, and inconsistency that unquestionably set Adams apart from Don Quixote.

One may argue whether Fielding was deliberate in choosing attributes from a prototype or whether he was influenced less consciously by Don Quixote's personality traits, but it is certain that even if Fielding was fully aware of the similarities between Don Quixote and Parson Adams, he did not copy. Nothing in the character of Adams or, in fact, in Joseph Andrews suggests a plagiarized reworking of an aspect of Don Quixote. Cervantes provided the inspiration for Parson Adams and a number of his personal characteristics, but the transformation of these basic qualities and the addition of unique personality traits

make Adams a character that Fielding himself knew, "is not to be found in any [other] book now extant."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Henry Fielding, Preface to The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of His Friend Mr. Abraham Adams (New York, 1948), p. xxiv.